

for 60 minutes, equally divided and controlled by the proponent and an opponent.

The gentleman from California (Mr. THOMAS) and the gentleman from New York (Mr. RANGEL) each will control 30 minutes of debate on the bill.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from California (Mr. THOMAS).

Mr. THOMAS. Mr. Speaker, I yield 15 minutes of my time to the gentleman from Wisconsin (Mr. SENSENBRENNER), and ask unanimous consent that he may control that time.

Prior to doing that, I ask unanimous consent that the gentleman from New York (Mr. RANGEL) be recognized.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Without objection, the gentleman from New York (Mr. RANGEL) is recognized.

There was no objection.

Mr. RANGEL. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that the first 15 minutes of my time be controlled by the gentleman from Michigan (Mr. CONYERS), the ranking member of the Committee on the Judiciary, and the remainder of my time be controlled by the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. LEWIS), a member of the Committee on Ways and Means.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from New York?

There was no objection.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Wisconsin (Mr. SENSENBRENNER).

Mr. SENSENBRENNER. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that I may be allowed to yield parts of my time to others.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Wisconsin?

There was no objection.

Mr. SENSENBRENNER. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I rise in strong support of H.R. 7. Quite simply, the aim of this legislation is to encourage more community-based solutions to social problems in America. When implemented, it will provide some truly life-changing opportunities to many individuals struggling in our communities across the country.

It says that faith-based organizations should no longer be discriminated against when competing for Federal social service funds because of a misconstrued interpretation of current law by some, and that we welcome even the smallest faith-based organizations into the war against desperation and hopelessness.

As a result, new doors will be opened to the neediest in our communities to receive help and assistance that they seek. This is a wonderful and compassionate goal that most, if not all, should be able to embrace. In fact, H.R. 7 could very well improve our culture in ways that we have not seen in decades.

The concept of Charitable Choice is not new. Federal welfare reform in 1996

authorized collaboration between government and faith-based organizations to provide services to the poor. Charitable Choice has allowed religious organizations, rather than just secular or secularized groups, to compete for public funding. Many faith-based organizations have been providing services to their community, but with government funding they are able to create new programs and expand existing ones.

For example, the Cookman United Methodist Church in Philadelphia has created a program of "education, life-skills, job placement, job development and computer literacy, and children and youth services" with their Federal funding. By testing new solutions to the problem of poverty, the Cookman Church has used Charitable Choice funds to expand their program of needed services into a much larger and more meaningful one for their community. They have done this under existing Charitable Choice law in the 1996 Welfare Reform Act, which allows them to help those in need without having to hire lawyers to create a separate secularized organization and without having to rent expensive office space outside their neighborhood church.

There are literally hundreds of other programs like that of the Cookman United Methodist Church that have benefited thousands of persons in need without raising constitutional concerns in their implementation. These organizations are striving to make a difference in communities all across America.

It is a tragedy that those who move to help others by the strength of faith face added barriers to Federal social service funds based upon misguided understandings of the Constitution's religion clauses. Often it is those whose earthly compassion has the deep root of faith who stand strongest against the whims of despair. Different rules should not apply to them when they seek to cooperate with the Federal Government in helping meet basic human needs.

Some of our colleagues have raised constitutional objections to this legislation. I believe that those objections, while sincere, are misguided. Charitable Choice neither inhibits free exercise of religion, nor does it involve the government establishment of religion. It simply allows all organizations, religious or non-religious, to be considered equally by the Government for what they can do to help alleviate our Nation's social ills.

Unfortunately, it has become all too common for faith-based organizations to be subject to blanket exclusionary rules applied by the government grant and contract distributors based upon the notion that no Federal funds can go to pervasively sectarian institutions. However, the Congressional Research Service concluded in its December 27, 2000, report to Congress on Charitable Choice: "In its most recent decisions, the Supreme Court appears to

have abandoned the presumption that some religious institutions are so pervasive sectarian that they are constitutionally ineligible to participate in direct public aid programs. The question of whether a recipient institution is pervasively sectarian is no longer a constitutionally determinative factor."

The pervasively sectarian test under which the patronizing assumption was made that religious people could be too religious to be trusted to follow rules against the use of Federal funds for proselytizing activity is, thankfully, dead. However, its ghost continues to linger in many of the implementing regulations of the programs covered by H.R. 7, and, unfortunately, in the rhetoric of many of H.R. 7's opponents.

For those with constitutional concerns, I also ask them to consider the changes to H.R. 7 that were adopted by the Committee on the Judiciary and just amended in this bill with the self-executing rule. These changes firm up the constitutionality of the bill and expand the options of individuals to receive government services from the type of organization they are most comfortable with.

To begin with, the bill now makes clear that when a beneficiary has objection to the religious nature of a provider, an alternative provider is required that is objectionable to the beneficiary on religious grounds, but that the alternative provider need not be non-religious. This same requirement appears in the Charitable Choice provisions of the 1996 Welfare Reform Act. If, of course, a beneficiary objects to being served by any faith-based organization, such a beneficiary is granted a secular alternative.

Existing Charitable Choice law contains an explicit protection of a beneficiary's right to refuse to actively participate in a religious practice, thereby ensuring a beneficiary's right to avoid any unwanted sectarian practices. Such a provision makes clear that participation, if any, in a sectarian practice, is voluntary and non-compulsory.

Further, Justices O'Connor and Breyer require that no government funds be diverted to religious indoctrination. Therefore, religious organizations receiving direct funding will have to separate their social service program from their sectarian practices. If any part of the faith-based organization's activities involve religious indoctrination, such activities must be set apart from the government-funded program, and, hence, privately funded.

The bill as reported out of the Committee on the Judiciary now contains a clear statement that if any sectarian worship instruction or proselytization occurs, that shall be voluntary for individuals receiving services and offered separate from the program funded.

Also the bill now includes a requirement that a certificate shall be separately signed by the religious organization and filed with the government agency that disperses the funds certifying that the organization is aware of